

# THE BOSTON INFORMER

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*The newsletter for people who care about Boston*

Fall 2006

## Towers in Boston

Boston has seen a plethora of "towers" planned and built in the past few years. Unlike New York which built the country's first tower—the 60-story Woolworth Building in 1913—Boston's tower phase didn't begin really until the late 1950s. The demise of the railroads in downtown Boston left large tracts of land for redevelopment, and combined with solid residential neighborhoods, pushed buildings up to the sky. A review of the history of Boston's towers reveals that many were never planned—they just happened, "sneaked by" or were symbolic icons, "critical to Boston's economy."

After Boston's two early towers—Custom House Tower (1915) and first John Hancock tower (1947)—no significant towers were built until the "high spine" concept for Back Bay was proposed. Originally conceived for Beacon Street in the Back Bay by Professor Von Moltke of MIT, it was shifted to Boylston Street and along the Turnpike extension and the high spine concept led to planning in Boston for prominent high-rise buildings. Among these are the Prudential, State Street Bank, 28 State St., One Boston Place and Harbor Towers. Love them or hate them, these towers were part of plans for the districts and areas they are in.

The next period of influence of towers in Boston is marked by a distinctive lack of planning. As a result of limited urban design input, buildings such as One Beacon, 100 Federal St. ("the pregnant building"), 60 State St. and One Federal St. were built. The 1980s saw more "unplanned" towers, followed by the recent spurt

of towers, built and approved, that far and away exceed building heights specified in the zoning code.

Yet, an analysis of towers and their impacts reveals that the height of a building can often be less important than how the tower hits the ground. Some of Boston's towers have retained their "tower status" (Custom House, Hancock, One Boston Place) by protecting their public open spaces while others (Prudential, State Street Bank) have been surrounded by lower buildings of 8–15 stories and are virtually obliterated from the ground-level view.

A view of Boston's skyline from the Rte. 2 in Arlington, from Piers Park in East Boston and from Dorchester Heights reveals Boston's downtown as depicted in the graphic below. Boston's planned towers respect the ground-level experience for the pedestrian. The rest of Boston's towers are hardly visible to the pedestrian, crammed in city blocks among 15-story buildings and narrow streets. Boston could succumb to the fate of San Gimignano in Italy in which every tower sought to outdo the others and all parties ended up losing, especially the pedestrian.



The Boston Informer graphic

**Greenway Update**—In August 2006 Gov. Romney, through the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, asked the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy to review the status of the entire Greenway corridor. Earlier this fall the Conservancy issued its report and recommendations. Key points in the recommendations:

- **A single organization (the Conservancy?) must have the authority and responsibility for the entire corridor.** Currently, the Conservancy has jurisdiction only over the park parcels. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society (MassHort) has control over three "open space" parcels (19, 21, 22). MassPike controls parcels slated for development.

- **Open space and park parcels:** Regular construction updates must be provided to neighboring communities.

- MassHort should lose its designation as holder of parcels 19, 21 and 22 because of its weak financial status. Conservancy director Edwin Schlossberg (Kennedy family appointee) will chair a committee to find new uses for the MassHort parcels.
- The Armenian Memorial should not be built on the Greenway

(Parcel 13), but should be located elsewhere. A five-year moratorium on memorials on the Greenway should be established.

- **Development parcels:** all currently designated developers, Boston Museum Project (Parcel 12), New Center for Arts and Culture (Parcel 18) and Harbor Islands Pavilion (Parcel 14), should be asked to submit updated plans and financials by June 30, 2007, to help determine their prospects for success. The YMCA should be asked for a decision about developing Parcel 6 by December 31, 2006, and "interim designs" such as ramp covers should be planned for any parcel that will not be ready by 2008.

- **Maintenance:** The Conservancy should formulate a strategic maintenance plan for the entire corridor, and responsibility for parks maintenance should be transferred from MassPike to the Conservancy as quickly as possible.

The Conservancy's recommendations are only advisory in the absence of legislation giving it more authority, so these recommendations may end up being ignored.

## People Movers

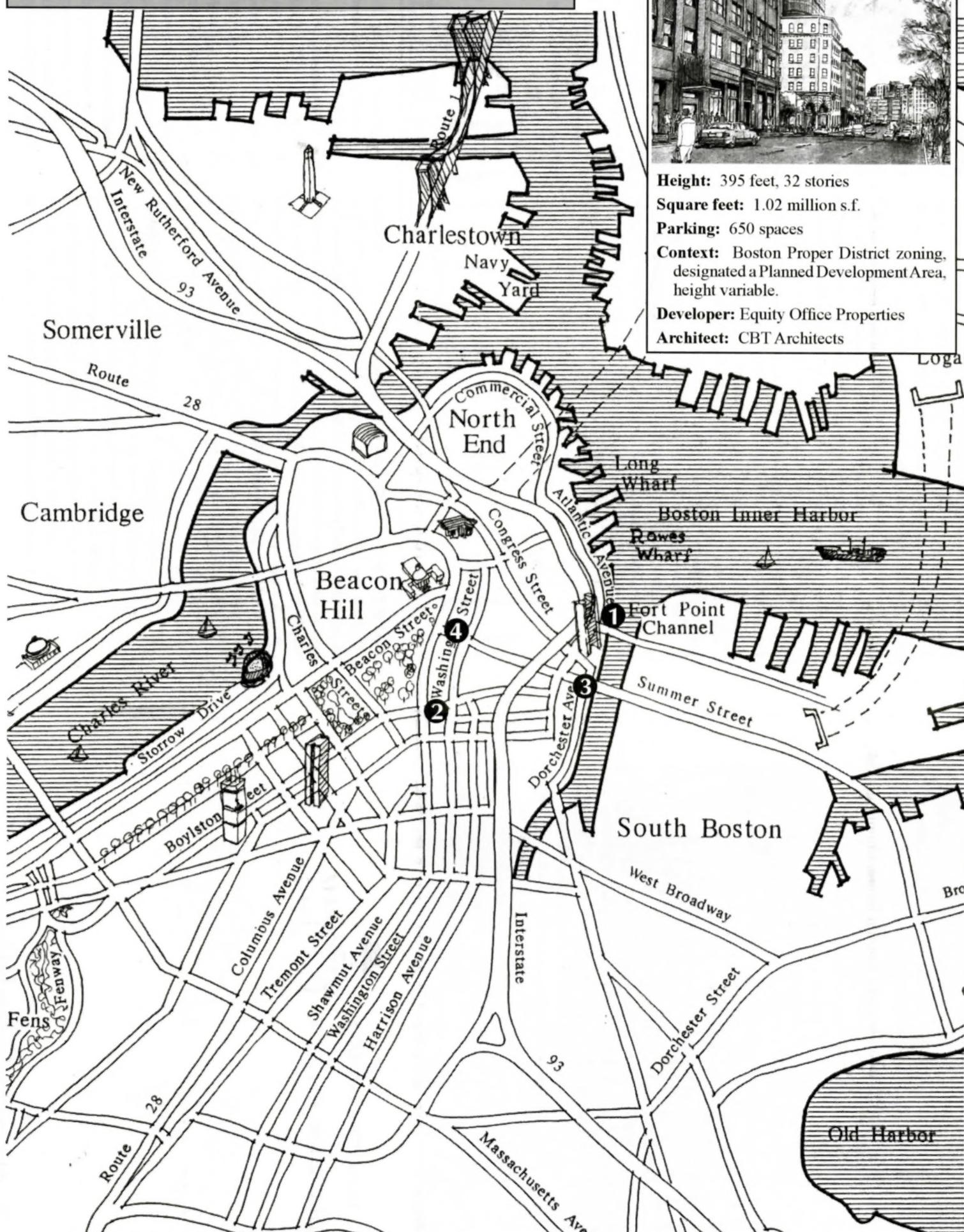
**Anthony Flint**, from Office of Commonwealth Development to Lincoln Land Institute.

**Dennis DiZoglio** will be leaving the MBTA in January to become executive director of Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission.

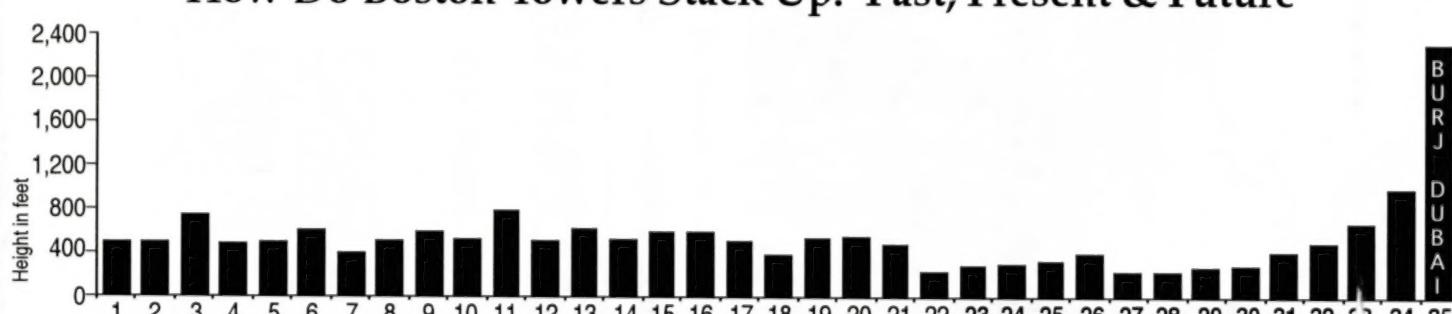
**Beth Leonard**, from Mayor Menino's campaign manager to chief of staff at the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

**Peter McNulty**, from URS Corporation to TRC Companies.

**Len Velichansky**, from HNTB Corporation to Traffic Solutions Inc.



### How Do Boston Towers Stack Up: Past, Present & Future



1. Custom House (1915)
2. Old Hancock Building (1947)
3. Prudential Building (1964)
4. State Street Bank, 225 Franklin St. (1966)
5. 28 State St. (1969)
6. One Boston Place (1970)
7. Harbor Towers I and II (1971)
8. One Beacon St. (1971)
9. First National Bank, 100 Federal St. (1971)
10. One Federal St. (1975)
11. John Hancock Tower (1976)
12. 60 State St. (1977)

13. Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (1977)
14. One Post Office Square (1981)
15. One International Place (1981)
16. One Financial Center, Dewey Sq. (1983)
17. Exchange Place, 53 State St. (1984)
18. Marriott Copley Place (1984)
19. Two International Place (1992)
20. 111 Huntington Ave. (2002)
21. 33 Arch St. (2004)
22. 500 Atlantic Ave. (2006)
23. Kensington Place, Chinatown
24. 45 Province St.

25. The Clarendon
  26. Russia Wharf
  27. Fan Pier office building
  28. 20 Somerset St.
  29. W Hotel, Theater District
  30. 31-45 Stuart St., Theater District
  31. Columbus Center
  32. Filene's Tower
  33. South Station Tower
  34. Winthrop Square Tower
  35. Burj Dubai (Persian Gulf)
- bold indicates proposed buildings**



**1 Russia Wharf Tower**

**Height:** 395 feet, 32 stories

**Square feet:** 1.02 million s.f.

**Parking:** 650 spaces

**Context:** Boston Proper District zoning, designated a Planned Development Area, height variable.

**Developer:** Equity Office Properties

**Architect:** CBT Architects



**2 31-45 Stuart St. Tower**

**Height:** 289 feet, 28 stories

**Square feet:** 362,000 s.f.

**Parking:** 219 spaces

**Context:** Midtown Cultural District zoning, Jacob Wirth Protection Area, 65-ft. height limit.

**Developer:** Weston Associates

**Architect:** Elkus/Manfredi Architects



**3 So. Station Tower**

**Height:** 678 feet, 40 stories

**Square feet:** 920,000 s.f.

**Parking:** 755 spaces

**Context:** So. Station Economic Development Area zoning, 465-ft. height limit.

**Developer:** Hines Interests/TUDC

**Architect:** Cesar Pelli & Assoc.



**4 Filene's Tower**

**Height:** 495 feet, 38 stories

**Square feet:** 1.25 million s.f.

**Parking:** 299 underground spaces

**Context:** Midtown Cultural District zoning, 155-ft. height limit; nearby buildings include 33 Arch St. (33 stories), 101 Arch St. (20 stories), Millennium (36 & 38 stories).

**Developer:** Gale International and Vornado Realty Trust

**Architect:** Elkus/Manfredi Architects

## Welcome to The Boston Informer

The goal is simple: provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to The Boston Informer!

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The Boston Informer is available by mail only. \$25.00 per year (cheap!). Questions? Telephone (617) 723-7030, fax (617) 437-1886 or e-mail: [BostonInformer@cs.com](mailto:BostonInformer@cs.com). Check us out on the web at [www.bostoninformer.com](http://www.bostoninformer.com)!

*International architect Renzo Piano has designed a 1,000-foot-high "green" tower to replace the Winthrop Sq. garage*



**Piano generates the sweet sound of tinkling tax dollars**

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## You Were Asking

- Q. I hear there are plans for a restaurant at the harbor end of Long Wharf—what's going on?
- A. The BRA invited proposals to build and operate a roughly 4,500-s.f. restaurant around the MBTA Blue Line tunnel egress building at the end of the wharf. The restaurant would have indoor/outdoor dining and seating for about 130. The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) is offering rent credit of about \$300,000 over five years to help with construction costs. The BRA received two responses at the Nov. 20 deadline: Legal Seafoods and Michael Conlon (Peking Tom's, 21st Amendment). The BRA will decide in early 2007.
- Q. Boston and the state do almost nothing to promote cycling and managed to build over 20 lane miles of surface streets as part of the Big Dig without a single bike lane. What could possibly be the point of the "Bike Route" sign on the ramp to I-93 south that leads to the bus ramp to the So. Station Transportation Center?
- A. We're glad our readers have eagle eyes for things like this—no one in an official capacity seems to have noticed this over the last 18 months. There is no point.
- Q. In all of the announcements about the MBTA fare increases, there seems to be no mention of fare increases for seniors. Are there any?
- A. We assume you are not a high school senior. Unfortunately, fares for those over 65 will be rising from 35 cents to 60 cents for subways and 25 cents to 40 cents for buses, increases of 70% and 60%, respectively, much higher than the percentage increase in regular fares.
- Q. Did I read in The Boston Globe that the BRA is looking forward to plans to redesign the Christian Science Center campus to generate property tax revenue? What's next? Buildings on Boston Common?
- A. No. Susan Elsbree of the BRA simply said the City would benefit from new buildings that would pay taxes unlike those on the spacious campus used by the church that are tax exempt.

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